



SUCCESS STORY

Hip-Hoppers Become Advocates for Peace



George Haddad

Edd raps about finding solutions to the troubles facing the region at a street performance he organized in Beirut with other hip-hoppers he met at an OTI-supported peace-building project.

“They say ‘if you want peace, you’ve got to prepare for war.’ We do war in our own way... our weapon is the pen and paper, and our ideology is based on revolutionary art and poetry: RAP.”

—Firas Safa (a.k.a. l’Faharrass), rap artist attracted to the project primarily for the hip-hop component

January 2009 – “If we had the least bit of intelligence, we’d use advocacy to defend and fight for our rights of livin’ peacefully,” sings Venus, a female Lebanese hip-hop artist.

The lyric is part of a song that evolved from a project of the Permanent Peace Movement (PPM), a conflict resolution NGO founded by university students during the height of Lebanon’s civil war. As part of a project supported by USAID’s Office of Transition Initiatives (OTI), PPM capitalized on the country’s growing hip-hop scene by coaching 20 young artists of different political and religious backgrounds to work as a group to spread messages of peace to Lebanese youth who are typically uninterested in conventional peace-building dialogues.

After participating in a camp on conflict resolution and using art as an advocacy technique, the youths produced *Peace Beats*, an album released at a concert celebrating International Peace Day. Over 1,000 copies of the recording have since been distributed, and the “peace project” hip-hoppers (as they came to be known) have performed the songs they composed through the project for young audiences at a number of informal gatherings, introducing concepts of peace and nonviolence to their peers.

Edouard Abbas (a.k.a. Edd) says, “The most rewarding thing is to see people relate to what I’m saying when I perform.” In his song “Salem Nafseh,” he speaks about “finding the inner peace that’s within you to be able to spread it to the world.”

The hip-hoppers shared their experiences at a second camp that brought together a group of 30 artists for coaching, including painters, actors, and musicians. “Many of them didn’t know art could be used for advocacy,” said PPM project manager Raffi Feghali, “but after learning from people who actually did it, they left with the idea that they can also achieve change through their art.”

The hip-hoppers have gone on to organize their own events, including an ad hoc street performance of rap and graffiti art to promote peace in Gaza. The experience has raised hopes that there is a future not only for hip-hop in Lebanon but also for peace among its people.